

### Factors that caused the deterioration in American-Turkish relations

Modebadze, Valeri

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Modebadze, V. (2020). Factors that caused the deterioration in American-Turkish relations. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 5(3), 96-101. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-66262-2>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.de>

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more Information see:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>



© 2019 The Author/s

This is an open access article distributed under the CC-BY 3.0 License.

Peer review method: Double-Blind

Date of acceptance: October 10, 2019

Date of publication: January 14, 2020

Review article

UDC 327(73:560)

Scan the QR code:



## FACTORS THAT CAUSED THE DETERIORATION IN AMERICAN – TURKISH RELATIONS

Valeri Modebadze

St. Andrew the First-Called Georgian University of the Patriarchate of Georgia

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1232-4841>

[valery\\_4\[at\]yahoo.com](mailto:valery_4[at]yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** *During the Cold War Turkey had excellent relations with the United States of America. Both countries needed each other and saw the Soviet Union as their main rival. Strategic Partnership was established between the two nations and USA provided military assistance to Turkey in order to contain the Soviet Union. With the assistance of the USA, Turkey managed to neutralize Soviet threat and integrate into NATO. Turkey became a close ally of the West. After the Cold War, American - Turkish relations have gradually cooled and deteriorated significantly over the last years. The aim of this article is to analyze those factors that have caused the deterioration of American – Turkish relations.*

**Keywords:** *International Relations; Turkey; USA; Strategic Partnership*

## INTRODUCTION: RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND USA DURING THE COLD WAR

After the Second World War, Turkey decided to choose pro-Western political course aimed at integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. In 1945 the Soviet Union became a superpower that was determined to extend its influence to the neighboring countries. The Kremlin intended to 'Sovietize' Turkey. The USA and the West helped Turkey during the most turbulent times, when the country expected Soviet invasion at any moment. Turkey desperately needed Western support in order to neutralize threats coming from the Soviet Union. In 1947, President Truman promised full political support to those countries that were threatened by the Soviet Union. Turkey became a member of the Council of Europe in 1949, and in 1952 it joined NATO. After Turkey joined NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance approached Soviet borders from the South. After the incorporation of Turkey into NATO, US military bases and missiles were deployed on its territory. Even nuclear weapons were stored within US military bases in Turkey from 1952 to 1963. To illustrate its gratitude to the United States; Turkey actively participated in the Korean War (1950-53). The Turkish Armed Forces fought side by side with the Americans in Korea (Omer 2005).

Due to its strategic geographical location, Turkey has always attracted the attention of the US administration. Turkey is the bridge between Europe and Asia. It is also worth noting that Turkey borders energy-rich Arab countries and Iran. It plays very important role in linking Central Asia and Caucasus to Europe. Oil and gas pipelines have considerably increased the strategic significance of Turkey. The Clinton administration played a crucial role in converting Turkey into a Eurasian energy hub and supported the transit of Caspian oil through Turkish territory. The USA realized that Turkey could easily become a key transit route of hydrocarbons from the landlocked Caspian Sea region to the West. The Clinton administration did not want Russia to be the sole supplier of energy to Europe and therefore it paid much attention to the creation of alternative energy corridors. Thanks to the efforts of the Clinton administration, major energy projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline have been implemented, which significantly increased Turkey's geopolitical importance as a transit country (Modebadze, Sayın and Yilmaz 2014).

## DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS AFTER THE COLD WAR

If warm and close relations existed between Turkey and the USA during the Cold War, deterioration of relationship can be observed over the last years. Various factors have caused a breakdown in bilateral relations. The first factor relates to the geopolitical shifts that occurred after the end of the Cold War. After the collapse of communism, the threat of the Sovietization of Turkey disappeared. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Turkey no

longer had a common border with its historic enemy, Russia. Instead of a large and aggressive Russia, its neighbors became small and weak states within the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan). Russia's military potential has also declined significantly since the collapse of the USSR. That is why Turkey no longer needed USA assistance in the field of security and was eager to become an independent geopolitical player and pursue independent politics in the international arena. As Russia's power is shrinking, Turkey is gradually becoming eager to become a Middle Eastern hegemon. In the 1990s, Pan-Turkism became a popular movement in Turkey advocating the creation of large Turkish state that would include both Turkey and post-Soviet Turkish-speaking countries.

Turkey is gradually becoming more active in the post-Soviet countries due to its desire to increase its influence in the space which was formerly under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey's new regional policy is often referred to as 'neo-Ottomanism', aiming to make Turkey a regional superpower.

Since the 1990s Turkey is experiencing economic growth, and consequently its political ambitions are also rising. Turkey no longer wants to be a US satellite country, and with its economic growth, its political ambitions are growing.

The second factor that causes the deterioration of relations is the complicated political situation in Syria: in the Syrian conflict, the US administration has assisted the Kurdish Armed Forces, which has angered Ankara. Ankara's dissatisfaction is also fueled by the activities of a Kurdistan Workers' Party in Iraq. Turkish authorities believe that the USA is taking no measures to neutralize this terrorist group, which frequently enters the Turkish territory and carries out numerous terrorist attacks in the country. The topic of the Kurdistan Workers' Party is one of the most pressing issues for the Turkish authorities, which often strains relations between the USA and Turkey. According to Turkish officials, Washington has been secretly assisting the Kurdistan Workers' Party, especially since the occupation of Iraq in 2003 (Özden 2019).

Washington has increased aid for the Kurds and supplied them with weapons since the Syrian conflict began and the Kurdish armed forces started to fight against the Islamic State. The Trump administration was supplying weapons to the Kurdish armed forces – Peshmerga and YPG, which fought against the Islamic State in the Syrian conflict. The US administration considered Peshmerga and YPG (People's Protection Units) to be an effective and legitimate force in the fight against the Islamic State. Turkish officials do not share this position and believe that YPG is a terrorist group which has close links with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). When the Trump administration decided to withdraw US troops from the Syrian territory, there was a danger that Turkish military units would destroy the Kurdish armed forces in Syria. In order to prevent a clash between Turks and Kurds in Syria, Trump threatened Turkey to inflict damage on its economy if Ankara attacked and destroyed the Kurdish armed forces in Syria (Özden 2019).

Trump's threatening remarks has greatly damaged US-Turkish relations. Turkey is gradually becoming an independent geopolitical player in the Middle East. Turkish President Erdogan believes that US-Turkish relations are asymmetric and incompatible with Turkey's geopolitical interests. The failed 2016 military coup is perceived by the Turks as the US intention to overthrow the Erdogan's regime and forcefully change the political system in Turkey.

A third factor that has strained the relations is related to the failed military coup: Relations between Ankara and Washington have deteriorated significantly since the 2016 military coup. The Turks believe that one of the main initiators of the coup was Fethullah Gulen, who resides in the USA, in Pennsylvania. He has been living in the United States since 1999. Turkish authorities are demanding the extradition of Gulen from the United States to Turkey, which the US administration vehemently opposes (Arslan, Dost and Wilson 2018). The US authorities require evidence from the Turkish authorities that this military coup was planned and organized by Gulen. Because of the lack of evidence, Washington does not consider it appropriate to hand over Gulen to the Turkish authorities. Since 2016, Erdogan has severed ties with the West and Turkey's traditional allies. He gradually began to draw closer to Russia and Iran. Offended Turkey is gradually shifting its focus to the East, expanding its ties with the Putin's regime and Iran. Turkish officials believe that the US administration, unlike the Iranian and Russian governments, has not publicly condemned the 2016 coup attempt and military putsch. Following the coup attempt in 2016, Iran and Russia sided with Erdogan and promised him both moral and political support. Turkey's rapprochement with Russia reached its peak when Erdogan bought the S-400 anti-aircraft missile complex from the Kremlin.


The fourth factor that significantly strained relations between Ankara and Washington is precisely related to the acquisition of anti-aircraft missile system. Ankara's intention to acquire a modern air defense system from Kremlin has further aggravated already strained relations with Washington. Washington believes the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system is not compatible with NATO's defense system. The USA authorities fear that by deploying this missile system on the territory of Turkey, sensitive military data of NATO might be transmitted to Russia and Kremlin may get valuable information about the American military planes (Simon Waldman 2019). Although USA officials, including Pence, have long warned Ankara that the acquisition of the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system would cause deterioration of relations and imposition of sanctions, Erdogan has not canceled the deal with Russia. This summer, Russia began delivering anti-aircraft missile systems to Turkey. After Belarus and China, Turkey became the third state where Russia sells its missile system (Krzysztof and Wilk 2019).

The acquisition of the air defense system is already causing some problems for Turkey. Turkey's move has sparked resentment from NATO's partners. Washington has been actively trying to halt the acquisition of the S-400 anti-aircraft missile complex, as US

authorities see a major threat in the rapprochement of Russia and Turkey. Turkish analysts believe Erdogan has taken this step in order to gain more independence. According to political analysts and experts, Turkey will face major problems with its strategic partners, both with USA and Europe, due to the acquisition of the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system. Erdogan's move has already had a negative effect on Turkey: the US has banned the sale of its F-35-s to Turkey because it fears that Russia might obtain information on secret aircraft technology. Turkey will no longer be involved in the production of the F-35-s, which will cause huge damage to the Turkish economy (about \$9 billion in losses).

According to the military agreement between Russia and Turkey, Moscow has to give Ankara 4 divisions worth of 2.5 billion dollars. If Washington imposes sanctions on Ankara; it will inflict a great damage on the Turkish economy as it did last year (Alex Ward 2019). The sanctions will also have a negative impact on Erdogan's popularity. We should not forget that Erdogan's party lost re-run of Istanbul mayor elections because of the sanctions and deterioration of the economic conditions in Turkey. Economists predict a new failure for the Turkish president. In case of sanctions, Erdogan will find it difficult to succeed in the field of economy and his rating will fall sharply. Last year, Erdogan faced some major problems when the US increased tariffs on Turkish metal and imposed sanctions on two Turkish officials. The sanctions led to the rapid devaluation of the Turkish lira. The same problems could befall the Turkish economy in the event of new sanctions.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen above, close and friendly relations with USA is a thing of the past. Many political analysts and experts believe that relations between Washington and Ankara will further deteriorate due to conflicting and contradictory geopolitical interests. The future of modern-day Turkey greatly depends on how relations between Washington and Ankara will develop. If US-Turkish tensions continue, Turkey may lose Western support altogether. If Turkey fails to regulate relations with the West, then it may become an anti-Western state. In such a case, there is a high likelihood that Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism will rise in Turkey, which will have a negative impact on the country's economic development. Turkey has to decide which path to choose: if it wants to become wealthy and prosperous nation, then its political establishment should improve relations with Washington and establish close ties with the West. Anti-western rhetoric and anti-Americanism will inflict a lot of damage on Turkey and its economy. 

## REFERENCES

1. Özden Zeynep Oktav (2019) US-Turkey Relations in the Trump Era: A Turkish Perspective, Available from: <https://thenewturkey.org/us-turkey-relations-in-the-trump-era-a-turkish-perspective>
2. Modebadze, Valeri, Sayin, F.M. and Yilmaz, R., (2014) Georgian – Turkish Relations since the Breakdown of Soviet Union, ÇankırıKaratekin University, Journal of The Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Volume 4, Issue 1, pp. 359-369. Available from: <https://dergipark.org.tr/download/article-file/382303>
3. Omer Goksel Isyar (2005) An Analysis of Turkish-American Relations from 1945 to 2004. Initiatives and Reactions in Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkish Journal of International Relations- Alternatives, Volume 4, number3. Available from: <https://dergipark.org.tr/download/article-file/19464>
4. Defne Arslan, Pinar Dost and Grady Wilson (2018) US-Turkey Relations: From Alliance to Crisis. Available from: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/us-turkey-relations-from-alliance-to-crisis>
5. Simon Waldman (2019) The new era of US-Turkey relations is defined by difference, not common goals, Available from: <https://www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/the-new-era-of-us-turkey-relations-is-defined-by-difference-not-common-goals-1.888840>
6. Krzysztof Strachota&AndrzejWilk(2019) The S-400 for Turkey. The crisis in Turkish-American relations escalates, Available from: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2019-06-12/s-400-turkey-crisis-turkish-american-relations-escalates>
7. Alex Ward (2019) How America's relationship with Turkey fell apart, Available from: <https://www.vox.com/world/2019/4/11/18292070/usa-turkey-trump-erdogan-s400>